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INKPOT LIFE AWARD WINNER
FERD JOHNSON
MOON MULLINS & M[illegible]EI

#128

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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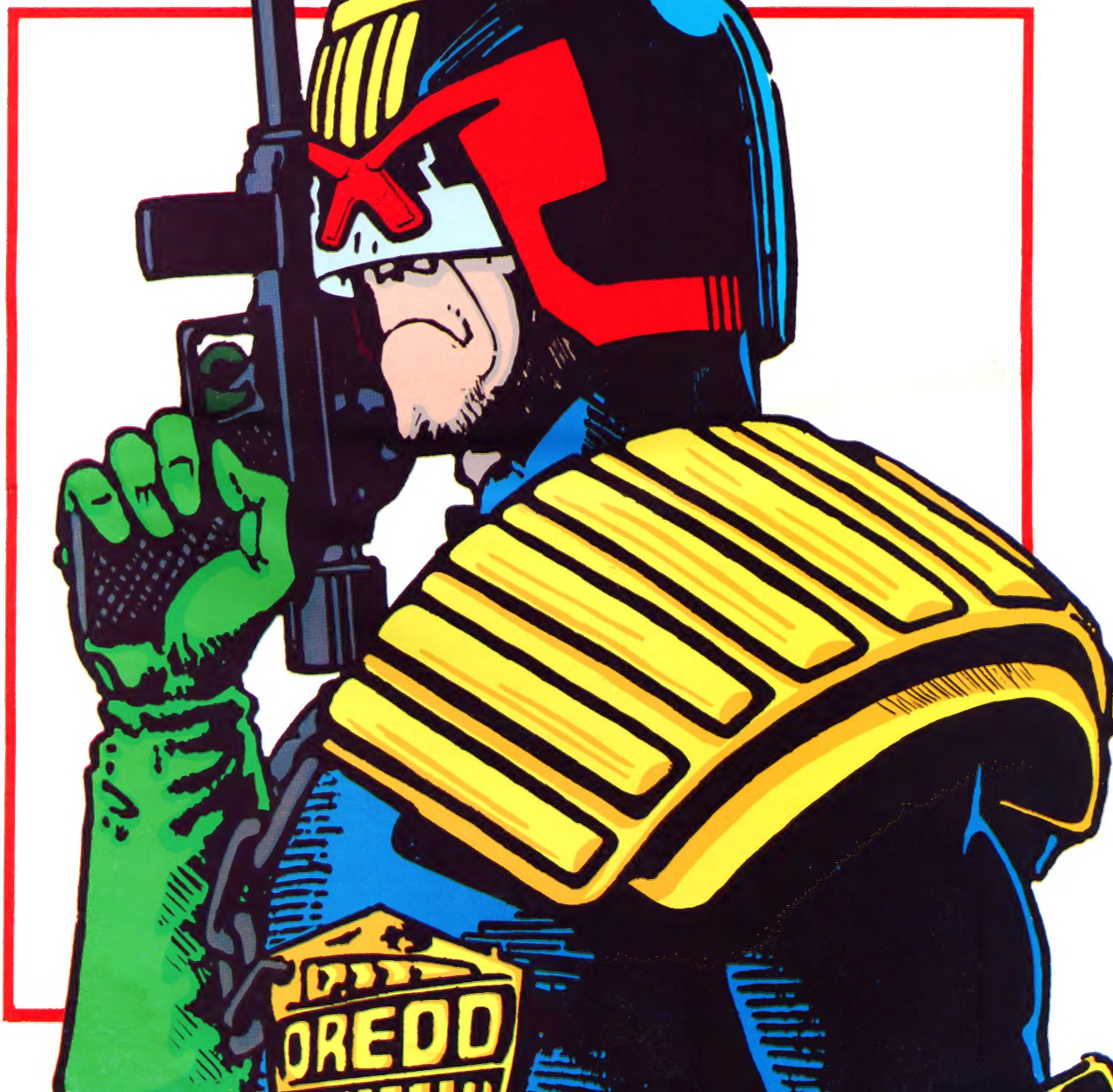

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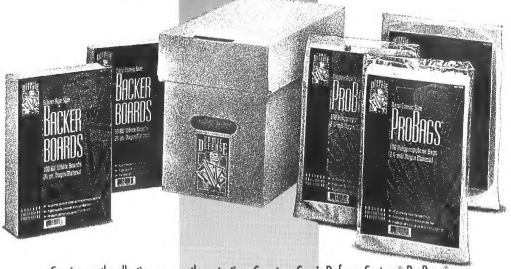

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UP FRONT

If you're feeling appalled by materialism this holiday — or you're just low on cash, but high on good will — here are some genuine gifts you could give (they're in very rare supply!):

1) TIME. Be considerate of others — include stamped, self-addressed envelopes if you write to any professional, and requests should be quick and easy to fulfill. For instance, just *imagine* how many letters, etc. someone such as **Stephen King** must receive; it's not realistic to expect much of a reply, if any, when you consider he's got to take time to write his books, run his business, be with his family. Time is the one thing that's precious — *for everyone*. Be considerate in any and every way you can, not to take it away from your favorite creative folks — or anyone else. Give the gift of time.

2) GRATITUDE. If anyone has helped you or inspired you or taught you or done you a good turn, large or small — thank them. This goes for professionals as well as fans. It costs you nothing and yet it's worth so much. Give the gift of gratitude.

3) QUALITY. Always give quality — whether in terms of time, if you're being paid to do a job or just volunteering help; if you're writing or drawing, publishing or distributing or retailing; if you're with friends or family. If anything's worth doing, it's worth doing well — give the gift of quality.

4) OPPORTUNITY. Whenever you have the chance to give anyone else an opportunity, to help or further someone's goals — do it.

5) THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT. It's easy to ascribe unsavory motives to those with whom you don't see eye to eye — and conveniently self-serving. Take the high road, try to imagine and understand their point of view — give others the benefit of doubt, don't rush to condemn.

What gift would I most like to receive —? TIME. Lots of quality time, fun time, good times with friends. What gift do I most need? Probably patience. But I'm happy with any of the other gifts listed above: gratitude, quality, opportunity, the benefit of doubt from detractors. Hey, I'll even settle for money!

DAVID

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FERD JOHNSON

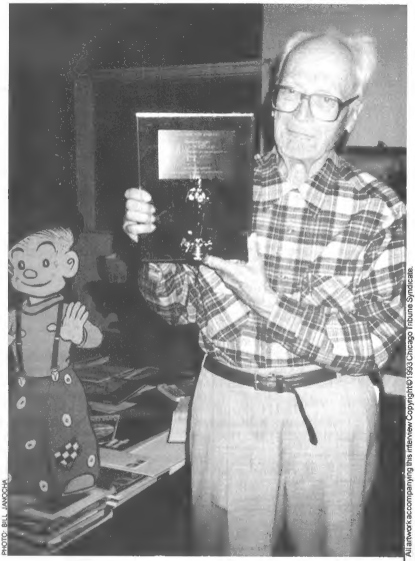


PHOTO © FERD JOHNSON

All the Familiar Characters Copyrighted by their Creators

Here's our interview subject, proudly displaying his newly-won Inkpot Award. (Ferd is the one on the right.)

It's just about ten decades now that comic strips have been a part of our daily papers. Through seven of those decades, Ferd Johnson has been creating them. In August, 1993, Ferd received the Inkpot Award for lifetime achievement in the field. In a three-part interview, he shares just a few of his memories of a lifetime with American comic strips . . .

SHEL DORF: *We're in Newport Beach, California, in the home of Ferd Johnson, who has an all-time record as a cartoonist. Ferd, how long did you work on the MOON MULLINS strip?*

FERD JOHNSON: Since 1923. That's 68 years.

SHEL: *Now, that's an all-time record. How did you get the job working for Frank Willard on MOON MULLINS?*

FERD: I think I should start by telling you when I sold my first cartoon. I was 13 and I sold it to a trade journal, and after they bought one each month for three months, in payment for them they sent me a gold watch. After that I did one a month for this outfit. My dad said, "There must be money in this business," so he got me a correspondence course from Cleveland — I think it was for twenty bucks — the Landon School. When I went through that he got me one with the Federal School in Minneapolis. I went through that one — at this time I was about 17 — so my dad

dad said, 'There must be money in this business.'"

MOON MULLINS
by Ferd Johnson
WHY DON'TCHA LOOSEN UP AND USE MOON'S CAB, PLUSHIE?
BECAUSE I'M IN A FRIGHTFUL HURRY, KAYO!
LADY PLUSHBOTTOM WANTS TO KNOW IF I LIKE A COAT SHE'S PICKED OUT FOR HERSELF, AND MY "NO" WILL SOUND MORE CONVINCING IF I'M THERE TO SAY IT!
FOUR.
FOUR.
HEY! THIS IS A ELEVATOR, NOT A GOLF COURSE!
OUT, PLEASE.
?
POW!
WOTTA PUNCH! MAMIE COULD TAKE LESSONS FROM HER!
THIS IS YOUR FLOOR, SIR.
TAKE ME UP TO THE TOP AND BACK, MISS— I'M A BIT SHAKEN UP.
IT'S GETTING SO A GIRL ISN'T SAFE ANY MORE! I JUST HAD THE MOST HARROWING EXPERIENCE IN THE ELEVATOR!
TSK-TSK-YOU SHOULD HAVE CALLED THE POLICE.
WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE SHE CLOBBERED YOU, PLUSHIE?
I HAVEN'T THE FOGGIEST NOTION, KAYO.
THERE'S THE OLD MASHER NOW! HELP! POLICE!
POLICE!
NEVER MIND THE POLICE, GIRLIE. THEY'D BE TOO EASY ON HIM.
SAY, PLUSHIE, I JUST GOT TO THINKIN'-- I WONDER IF THAT OLD DAME THOUGHT IT WAS YOU THAT PINCHED HER ON THE ELEVATOR WHEN SHE STEPPED ON MY TOES.
FERD JOHNSON 2-15
KITTY HIGGINS
GEE... ALL TH' WAY FROM COAST TO COAST IN FOUR HOURS-- THAT'S WHAT I WANT TO BE, KITTY... A JET PILOT!
IT KINDA MAKES ME WANT TO TAKE UP FLYING AGAIN.
AGAIN? YOU'VE NEVER FLOWN!
MAMA--TELL KAYO I HAVE TOO FLOWN BEFORE!
NO, KITTY-- YOU HAVE NEVER BEEN UP IN THE AIR.
OH, YEH-- WHAT ABOUT THE TIME THE STORK BROUGHT ME?
FERD JOHNSON 2-28

Ferd Johnson, whose two-thirds of a century on MOON MULLINS stands as the longest stint any creator ever put in with any American comic strip, wrote and drew this Sunday episode in 1959.

"Willard's ideas were thrown in the trash, but you'd see

This promotional piece, which the syndicate sent out to newspapers, gives a concise rundown on the MOON MULLINS characters.

OUR HERO...
MOON MULLINS!
A GREAT GUY ACCORDING TO HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY.
LORD PLUSHBOTTOM...
ONE OF NATURE'S NOBLEMEN -- WHO'S WIFE HAS SUPREME CONFIDENCE IN HIM... WHEN SHE IS WITH HIM.
MRS. WM. P. MAMIE MULLINS!
SHE CAN TEAR A NEW YORK TELEPHONE BOOK IN HALF-MAKE HER MAD AND SHE'S LIABLE TO DO THE SAME TO YOU.
UNCLE WILLIE...
HE'S PERFECTLY SATISFIED WITH HIMSELF EVEN IF HIS WIFE ISN'T.
LADY EMMY PLUSHBOTTOM!
THE EFFICIENT LANDLADY... IN SPITE OF NATURE'S BEING A BIT STINGY WITH HER IN THE DEPARTMENT OF LOOKS AND BRAINS.
AND MOON'S KID BROTHER...
KAYO!
Willard

If this comic is not yet running in your city, inquire about terms now!

CHICAGO TRIBUNE - NEW YORK NEWS Syndicate INC.
M. SLOTT, Manager NEWS BUILDING, New York 17 TRIBUNE TOWER, Chicago 11

says, "okay, go to college, or whatever you want." I chose art school, the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. It was a big jump from a town of 300 people to Chicago.

SHEL: *What town were you born in?*

FERD: A little town called Spring Creek, Pennsylvania, 60 miles inland from Erie, at the foot of the Allegheny. It's beautiful country, but there wasn't anything there for an artist, so I lit out for Chicago.

SHEL: *Tell me about the drawings you did when you were 13, your first drawings. What were they about?*

FERD: They were for a railroad station agent magazine — sort of political cartoons. In a way, they upheld the agents as having too much work and so on, so they went for that.

SHEL: *What made you do these cartoons? Was it an open competition?*

FERD: No. But I did enter a contest in the Erie DISPATCH-HERALD and won it when I was about 12. I was so excited about this that I immediately started drawing like mad — sketching and all that sort of stuff to learn how to draw. There was an old cartoonist by the name of **Art Bristow** who lived in the next town who heard I could draw, and he was starting a new magazine. It was a little magazine, the size of READER'S DIGEST — the first magazine that ever came out like that, only he wrote it all himself. A year or two later, these guys in Pleasantville, New York, started the same thing, the same size and everything, but they stole everything they put in there. That's how READER'S DIGEST started. It was just reprints, but later on they were sued and they had to start paying for the reprints.

But this little magazine was called THE HAYRAKE. It was very cute and, like I say, this guy wrote the whole thing. He hired me to do posters and stuff like that to go around for the newsstands. He didn't pay me much, but he was an artist and we used to go out sketching together. I think that helped a lot. Later on, **Frank King,** who drew GASOLINE ALLEY, got me aside one time when I had just started with **Willard,** and he said, "Ferd, if you want to learn how to draw, get yourself a sketchbook and go out and draw everything you see. Go up and down an alley and draw ash cans, telephone poles . . . anything, then go back home and try to duplicate it from memory. Then go back and check it out. Keep going back and forth and, within three or four trips, you're going to know how to draw those things."

SHEL: *Did you have any skills at writing at this point?*

them in George McManus's strip a couple of weeks later."

FERD: None whatsoever. I thought I could make sense, but that's about all.

SHEL: *Were you on your own when you went to Chicago, or did your foils move there with you?*

FERD: No, no. I went there by myself. And that was an exciting town on those days. **Al Capone** and all those guys were there.

SHEL: *What year was that?*

FERD: 1923.

SHEL: *This was just two years after Chester Gould had done the same thing. So it's Chicago in 1923, and you're a 17-year-old kid from a small town. What's the first thing you did?*

FERD: I went to a movie, I guess, and I found out you could eat at an automat very cheap.

SHEL: *You had a cardboard suitcase?*

FERD: *(Laughter.)* No, it was an *excellent* straw suitcase, and a trunk with wooden braces all around it. I went to a rooming house there with two other guys for five bucks a week. The school set me up there. But then when I went with **Willard** I was in the bucks — I was making $15 a week then.

SHEL: *How long did you stay at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts?*

FERD: I got kicked out in two months.

SHEL: *Why?*

FERD: A guy at the Academy knew **Willard** from way back, and he asked **Willard** to come up and teach a class. So **Willard** came up and he stood it for two weeks, two Saturdays. Well, I was there, and when he looked over everybody's work, he came to mine and invited me up to the Tribune Tower — it was the old plant then, before the tower went up.

SHEL: *Before the Gothic building? The winner of an architecture contest?*

FERD: Yes. So, I think I beat him back to his office because I was so anxious to get there. And I went and watched him work for a couple of weeks. I sat on one of these old steam heat things that was sharp on top until I had creases on my butt! And he finally turned around and said, "Ferd, if you're going to keep hanging around here, I'm going to put you to work." So he did, at $15 a week.

That was all I needed. I went to a YMCA for five bucks a week. It was great living. It had a swimming pool and all that stuff. And I had ten bucks left over to blow on food. That won't get you a meal nowadays.

SHEL: *Now, you started with Willard in late 1923?*

FERD: The fall of '23. **Willard** started MOON in June and I was working for him within two months — about August.

SHEL: *Had he done anything before MOON MULLINS?*

FERD: Yes. He came from the **Hearst** outfit. He had done a strip there called THE OUTTA LUCK CLUB, which he hated. He went into the army in World War I, and when he came out, **Billy DeBeck,** who was a friend of his, was with the **Hearst** outfit, doing BARNEY GOOGLE. Billy invited **Willard** to stay with him, and he got him a job with King Features.

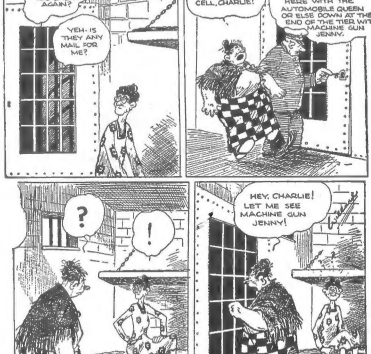
SHEL: *Was this in New York or Chicago?*

FERD: New York. So, in those days they had to submit their ideas to a guy named **Bloch** — the comics editor. Every guy, including Willard, had to submit the six daily ideas. **Willard** would go up there, and **Bloch** would read these things over and toss them in the wastepaper basket, which hurt **Willard** very much. In fact, later on he got damned sore about it. And, the thing is, you would see them come out in **George McManus's** strip a couple of weeks later. **Bloch** would feed these ideas to George, who was the star man. Later on they became good friends, but then it made **Willard** so damn sore that he had a couple of drinks, went down there, and let him have one — knocked him right on the floor. He knew he was going to get fired for doing that, and he did, but the story got around to **Captain Patterson,** who was just starting THE NEW YORK NEWS, and he had been wanting a "tough" strip. All his strips were very nice and sweet, and when he heard about **Willard** knocking the hell out of this guy he said, "There's my man!" and he called him in. That's how MOON MULLINS got its start!

SHEL: *That's great! So he moved to Chicago and he was teaching at an art school, where he discovered you. What was your first work in those days? What did you do?*

FERD: Lettering, and then backgrounds.

One of Those Exclusive Society Women


HELLO, MAMIE! YOU BACK AGAIN?
YEH - IS THERE ANY MAIL FOR ME?
SAY- I WANT ME OLD CELL, CHARLIE!
YOUR OLD ONES FILLED UP, MAMIE - I'LL HAVE TO PARK YOU IN HERE WITH THE AUTOMOBILE QUEEN OR ELSE SOMEBODY'LL END UP CHASING GUN JENNY.
?
!
HEY, CHARLIE! LET ME SEE MACHINE GUN JENNY!

Little-known fact: Two of the major characters of MOON MULLINS first met in jail! In this 1928 episode, written and drawn by strip creator Frank Willard, Emmy and Mamie lay eyes on each other for the very first time. (Of course, in Emmy's case, it was merely a dreadful misunderstanding.)

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"Frank King claimed he could make a cartoonist of anybody."

SOMEBODY'S MOVING IN NEXT DOOR. MY! MY! LOOK AT THAT FURNITURE!
I AIN'T INTERESTED EMMY.
OH, BABY! LOOK AT TH' LADY! AIN'T SHE A DILLY!!
SHHH! DON'T HOLLER SO LOUD, KAYO. THE NEW THING WILL HEAR YOU.
WHERE?
SHE'S WEAIT IN TH' HOUSE NOW.
WELL, OF ALL TH' NERVE!
Williams
COME, COME, EMMA, DO WE HAVE TO LISTEN ALL DAY TO THAT PIECE-BY-PIECE DESCRIPTION OF OUR NEW NEIGHBORS FURNITURE?
HUMPH! I BET SHE THINKS SHE'S PRETTY.
SOMEBODY MUST THINK SHE IS. LOOK AT THAT MINK KIMONO!

A new neighbor gives the gang at Emmy's boarding house a chance to show how they interact, in this pair of 1951 MOON MULLINS strips. Although Frank Willard's signature is affixed to them, these strips were written and drawn by Ferd.

And gradually I got to inking in the figures, until I could do it all. I was with him for 35 years before he died, but the last ten years he couldn't work — he was in poor health — and I was doing it for the last ten years that I was with him, so when the change came, there was no difference. But, the minute my name went on it and **Willard's** came off, 25 papers dropped it. That shows you the power of a name.

SHEL: *Were there any real-life counterparts to Lord Plushbottom and Emmy?*

FERD: No. There was a character in MUTT AND JEFF, Cedric or something like that — a skinny guy. He was an Englishman and I guess the Captain liked him, so he asked **Willard** to do an English lord. So he did Plushbottom, who turned out to be a real lord, but down on his luck. He needed a cheap boarding house to live in, so he went to Emmy Schmaltz's boarding house, and later on decided he could save more money if he married the landlady. She was willing because she wanted to be called Lady Plushbottom, so that's how that started.

SHEL: *How did Moon Mullins himself originate?*

FERD: In those days, during Prohibition, "moonshine" was a big word, so Captain named him Moonshine, which was shortened to Moon.

SHEL: *And he said he wanted a tough character. Wasn't Moon a prizefighter, or something like that?*

FERD: He was a pool player. That was how he made his living. He was a pretty good gambler — penny ante stuff.

SHEL: *Patterson was a great one for adding little ingredients to the kettle.*

FERD: He was a genius!

SHEL: *We've never seen anybody, since he died, who's had that touch with comic strips, have we?*

FERD: No. Patterson would come down to our office, stick his feet on our desk, and talk for hours. He just loved to talk about cartoons. He would suggest ideas, and a lot of them were very good.

SHEL: *Now, did you guys do work for the newspaper as well, like spot cartoons or anything like that?*

FERD: No, they had an art department where they did the typical, run-of-the-mill cartoon stuff.

SHEL: *Who worked in the TRIBUNE offices, in your cartoon room?*

FERD: Next to **Willard,** who was down at the end of the hall, was **Frank King,** who did GASOLINE ALLEY, and his assistant, a guy named **Sals Bostwick,** who did something called HEROES OF THE WEEK, which **Hearst** liked. **Hearst** hired him away, but shortly after that **Bostwick** died. But **Frank King** always claimed he could take *anybody* and make a cartoonist out of him, even with no talent at all. He wanted to prove it, so he went up to the syndicate office and picked out a shipping clerk and invited him to come down. That was **Bill Perry,** and he made **Bill Perry** a cartoonist. He carried the pages on for quite awhile after **King,** until **Dick Moores** came along.

SHEL: *That's incredible! What was King's procedure? How did he do it?*

FERD: He just made the kid draw constantly. Sketching like I told you. Out sketching everything.

SHEL: *Who else was in the department then?*

FERD: **Carl Ed,** who did HAROLD TEEN, was in the next office, and with him was **Gaar Williams,** who was a great cartoonist. Two or three doors down was **Sidney Smith,** THE GUMPS. **Harold Gray** was his assistant before he had ANNIE. And I was in there. I had something going before ANNIE. I wanted to be a cartoonist, too, so . . . all the heads of the TRIBUNE — editors and such — would play deck tennis right next to where we worked, out on the roof, and they had to climb over my desk to get there. Well, I made damn sure I had a cartoon there every time they came through! Finally one day **Patterson** saw it and said, "I think

"Chester Gould used to come up with a new strip every week.

you can do a Sunday page." So he accepted six of them. CON CARNEY THE COP he called it. It was a cop strip. Well, after about six weeks he called me up to the office and said, "I don't think that's the one for you." I was one disappointed kid. But he said, "What I'd like to have you do is a cowboy strip." He loved cowboys — went to every cowboy picture that ever came out. He had me do TEXAS SLIM, which he named — he named all the comics. It ran for a couple of years, until **Patterson** — still nuts about cowboys — went out to Wyoming to a ranch. He got on a horse, but the horse bucked and threw him off. It damn near broke his neck! He came back madder than hell and threw me out of the paper. *(Laughter.)* Later it started again and ran for 18 years, until I took over MOON entirely. It was too much work for one man to do both strips, and I didn't have an assistant.

SHEL: *I've seen some of those early TRIBUNE papers. In the '40s, when comic books were coming out, the TRIBUNE printed a little comic booklet, so they could advertise a free comic book in the Sunday section. Didn't TEXAS SLIM appear in that format?*

FERD: Yes. There were four comics, I think, or maybe six. BRENDA STARR was one, and two or three others. It didn't last, but BRENDA lasted.

SHEL: *I remember TEXAS SLIM because I had some of those little sections. And, of course, it ran in the DETROIT FREE PRESS as well.*

FERD: Yeah, and when that happened — DETROIT FREE PRESS came out in the 1930s — they took one of my pages called LOVEY DOVEY. I was elated, so I went out to **Chet Gould**'s house to brag about this, and he said, "Well, I got something in there, too!" It was DICK TRACY.

SHEL: *Can you tell us a little about when you first met Chet — Chester Gould?*

FERD: Well, he used to come up there with strips trying to get in the TRIBUNE. I was way down at the end of the hall, and he said he used to come up there and envy me when I was making 15 bucks a week. He was on the CHICAGO AMERICAN where he did something called FILLUM'S FABLES. He was a very good artist, but he kept submitting stuff to **Captain Patterson** for several years, at least, and he got turned down every time. He finally hit on this detective thing. **Patterson** bought it, and it went to town.

SHEL: *Chet's daughter, Jean, has those strips that he submitted. I saw them last June. She put about six of them up in the Chester Gould Museum in Woodstock. There was a lawyer strip, two girls running a dress shop, a little western strip, little boys and little girls doing funny things . . . and she has those originals to this day. And she also has an album of his rejection letters.*

FERD: *(Laughter.)* Oh, boy! I bet he had a lot of them!

SHEL: *It's a thick binder!*

FERD: That guy would come up with a new strip every week. He was a bulldog at it. People used to laugh at him around there — I mean other cartoonists. They'd say, "Here comes that would-be cartoonist."

SHEL: *So, anyway, your strip, LOVEY DOVEY, ran in the DETROIT FREE PRESS?*

FERD: Yes. It ran in the FREE PRESS, or whatever paper that was, and when it folded the comic folded, but he kept DICK TRACY.

SHEL: *Oh, you're referring to the DETROIT MIRROR, which is a tabloid Bernard MacFadden had started in competition to the NEW YORK DAILY NEWS.*

FERD: Right! I think it only lasted a year or so.

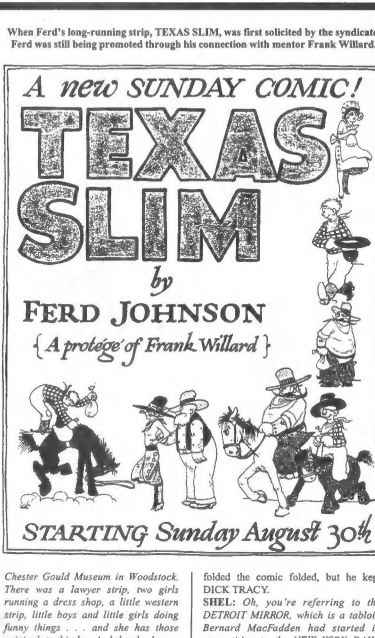
SHEL: *That's where DICK TRACY started and that's where your strip started, too. And when that folded, the FREE PRESS picked up both strips.*

FERD: And TRACY went to town!

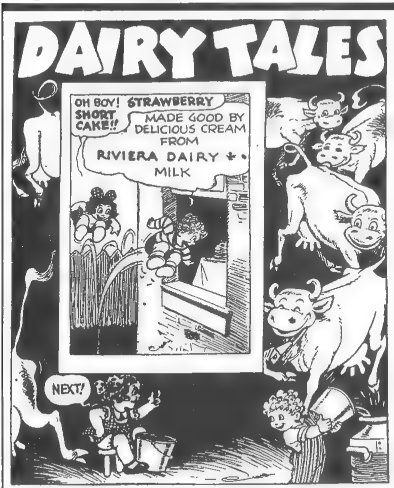
SHEL: *What do you think the secret of DICK TRACY's possibility was?*

FERD: It was well thought out. He knew what he was doing. He went to Northwestern Police Academy for a year or two and studied inside police work. He really went all out for it.

When Ferd's long-running strip, TEXAS SLIM, was first solicited by the syndicate, Ferd was still being promoted through his connection with mentor Frank Willard.



People would laugh and say, 'Here comes that would-be cartoonist.'"


DAIRY TALES
OH BOY! STRAWBERRY SHORT CAKE!!
MADE GOOD BY DELICIOUS CREAM FROM RIVIERA DAIRY & MILK
NEXT!
Strawberries Aren't Always in Season . . .
Riviera Dairy Products ARE!
At Grocers or Phone 6197 for Home Delivery

Ferd did comics-style advertising art for several clients. The one above was syndicated among several small, local dairies. It was published in 1938. A sample of TEXAS SLIM appears below. Shown here is the strip for Sunday, June 15, 1950.

SHEL: *Now, wasn't it the policy to work in the TRIBUNE building?*

FERD: Yes.

SHEL: *How did you dress? Was it suit and tie, or a white shirt, or what?*

FERD: I think everybody had a tie on in those days.

SHEL: *I've seen pictures of the guys then and they seem to take a little more formal approach. So when you worked in the office you always dressed up a little bit?*

FERD: We always did. And **Sid Smith** . . . my God, he'd have a wing collar, derby hat. He used to live within a block of where I did when I moved out of the Y to a small hotel, and he would go down to the office in his Locomobile, wide open. He would sit in the back seat with his wing collar, derby hat, and camel skin coat. He'd have a cane, and he would squirt tobacco juice out the side! So everybody got to know him.

SHEL: *THE GUMPS was real Americana. It was known and loved all over the world*

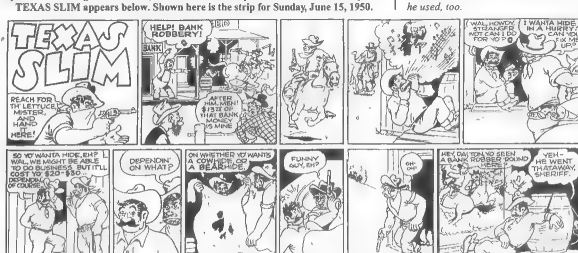
FERD: It was the first strip that had a story in it.

SHEL: *Yeah. When he killed the MARY GOLD character the whole nation went into mourning.*

FERD: He had a writer doing it. There was a guy named **Sol Hess,** a jeweler who lived close to him when he used to be over on Madison Street, and he came up and started giving Sid ideas, then he started writing THE GUMPS. That's when he got the story bit going.

Sid was a hell of a good artist. He was crude, but if he wanted to make a fingernail stand out in a crowded panel, he could do it.

SHEL: *I like that cross-hatch style that he used, too.*


TEXAS SLIM
REACH FOR TH' LETTUCE, MISTER, AND HANG HERE!
HELP! BANK ROBBERY!
BANK
AFTER WALKIN' $15 OF YUH BANK MONEY IS MINE
WAL, HOWDY STRANGER! YOU'RE TOO LATE!
I WANTA HIDE, I'M A HURRY! YOU CAN GO TO ME HOUSE
SO YO' WANTA HIDE, EH? WAL, WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO GIVE IN SOME BUTTLE MILK AND EGGS IF COURSE
DEPENDIN' ON WHAT?
ON WHETHER YO' WANTS A COW OR A BEAR
FUNNY GUY, EH?
OH!
HEY, DAI TEM, YO SEEN A BANK ROBBER AROUND HERE?
YEH - HE WENT THATAWAY, SHERIFF!
6-15

"It was called LITTLE ORPHAN OTTO, but Patterson

MAMIE WANTS TO KNOW HOW MANY CANDLES YOU RATE ON THAT CAKE SHE'S BAKIN' FOR YOUR BIRTHDAY PARTY, EMMY – SHE'S AFRAID TH' CAKE AIN'T BIG ENOUGH.
THIRTY, TELL HER, KAYO.
THIRTY? HAHAHAHA-HOHOO OOH!

FERD: I liked **George Herriman,** too. He was a great pen artist. I copied him.

SHEL: *What pen point were you using?*

FERD: A 290, I think. They don't make them anymore.

SHEL: *Gillot 290? That had a spring to it, where you could get a nice thick and thin line.*

FERD: Yeah. Some guys used 170s, but we all used 290s.

SHEL: *What was the working day like, down that hall with all those desks?*

FERD: Well, when I started Slim, for example, I didn't know how to draw animals, so I'd go to **Gaar Williams.** He had a memory like an encyclopedia. He could draw anything!

And these guys all started with the sketching and all that stuff. The old art schools used to have a model — one model. The whole class would walk around the model, then go back into another room and do their drawing. They'd keep going back and forth. That's where that started. And **Williams** could do it. He could draw an old pot-bellied stove with the isinglass window and he could get every detail that he saw as a kid.

SHEL: *Milton Caniff had the reputation of having the most complete clipping file of anybody. The Library of Congress actually came to him for information at one time. Did you guys also have clipping files, or photographs?*

FERD: *(Laughter.)* No. We were comic artists.

SHEL: *Can you tell me a little bit about Harold Gray?*

FERD: **Harold Gray** was a very good assistant. I used to go in and watch him knock out a whole set of strips in about two or three hours. He'd just zing, zing, zing!

SHEL: *This was before ANNIE, when he was assisting Smith on THE GUMPS?*

FERD: Yes. I was walking down the hall with Harold one day — going to lunch or something — when **Captain Patterson** came along and said, "Harold, I'd like to see that Sunday page that you worked up into a strip." And that was the start of ANNIE. When **Gray** submitted it, it was called LITTLE ORPHAN OTTO, but **Patterson** thought it would have more appeal if it was a little girl, so he called it LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE, and that one took off, too.

SHEL: *Patterson had the knack of knowing what the public wanted.*

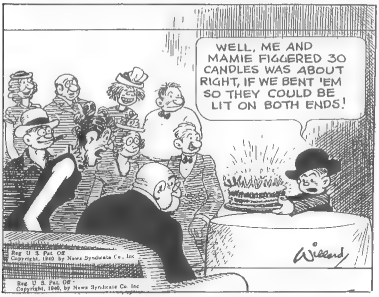
FERD: Right. He was a writer himself. He did plays and things like that.

SHEL: *When he would come into your offices and just sit around and talk to the cartoonists, what were some of the things that he discussed? Was he the kind of guy who would listen to ideas from others?*

FERD: He used to come down and see me on TEXAS SLIM and suggest things. I remember one time I wanted Slim to take a trip back to the big city. He gave me the

I WAS JEST THINKIN' THAT IF I HAD, SAY, SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS, I'D GET LADY P SOME FLOWERS FOR HER BIRTHDAY.
YOU'RE SURE GETTIN' VERY THOUGHTFUL, KAYO.
THANKS, MOON.
2-9.

thought it would have more appeal with a little girl."


WELL, ME AND MAMIE FIGGERED 30 CANDLES WAS ABOUT RIGHT, IF WE BENT 'EM SO THEY COULD BE LIT ON BOTH ENDS!
Willard
Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.
Copyright, 1940, by News Syndicate Co., Inc.
Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.
Copyright, 1940, by News Syndicate Co. Inc.

Newspaper strips are often drawn so they can be run in varying formats to fit the needs of different papers. In these two strips (Aug. 15, 1940 and Feb. 9, 1943), horizontal lines running through the panels indicate where the strips were cropped. Curiously enough, it's the cropped version that was printed larger. In papers that ran the strip across five columns rather than four, the cropped version took up less vertical space. (Nowadays, daily strips are distributed only in the *dismal* three-column format.)

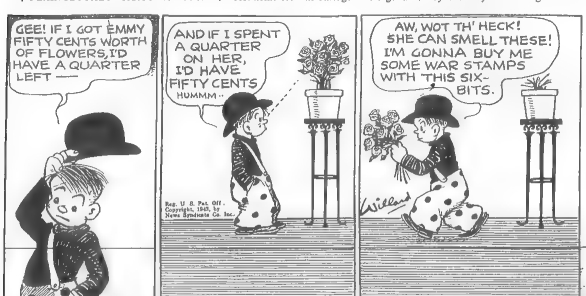
go-ahead on it and then suggested things. Well, it was a bum idea. It was supposed to be a western strip. A cowboy in Chicago might have been all right for a short period . . .

SHEL: *Well, later on Dennis Weaver's television show, McCLOUD, was very popular using that theme.*

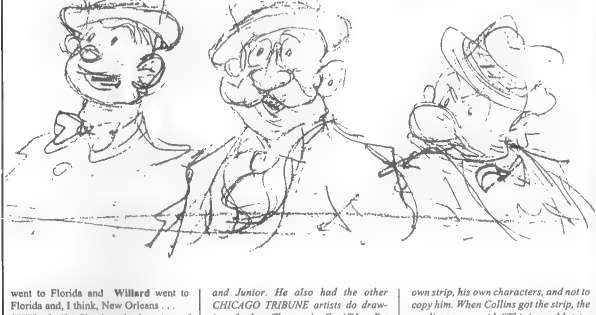
You know, I don't think those early days with Captain Patterson have been written about very much at all. Whenever Gould gave his interviews, though, he always gave Captain Patterson the credit for changing PLAINCLOTHES TRACY to DICK TRACY — because that's what reporters called cops; they called them "dicks." I'm just fascinated that you knew Chet before the days of DICK TRACY. Do you have any stories about Chet?

FERD: Willard used to live quite a ways from the office. I lived between **Willard** and the office, around Edgewater Beach Hotel, and I had a car. I had TEXAS going and I was making fifty bucks a week, so I could afford a car. I would go out to pick up **Willard** and we'd head for the office, but we would pass Chet's place and we always stopped, because Chet made the best home brew in Chicago! We'd go in and have a few drinks with him and then go out and pitch horseshoes. Well, by the time we got to the office it would be three or four o'clock, or four or five o'clock, so we always had to work at night.

If we did get down there on time, Chet and some of these guys would have a poker game going, and *that* took care of the rest of the afternoon! It was a lot of fun, but nobody got any work done. So that's when they'd have to take their work home and do it. Eventually somebody found out that they could do it out of town — wherever there was a mailbox. So, one by one they left Chicago. **Frank King**


GEE! IF I GOT EMMY FIFTY CENTS WORTH OF FLOWERS, I'D HAVE A QUARTER LEFT —
AND IF I SPENT A QUARTER ON HER, I'D HAVE FIFTY CENTS
HUMMM · ·
AW, WOT TH' HECK! SHE CAN SMELL THESE! I'M GONNA BUY ME SOME WAR STAMPS WITH THIS SIX-BITS.
Willard
Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.
Copyright, 1943, by
News Syndicate Co. Inc.

"When Willard's name went off MOON, we lost 25 papers."



This unpublished pencil art by Frank Willard was found on the back of the original art for a MOON MULLINS strip.

went to Florida and **Willard** went to Florida and, I think, New Orleans . . .

SHEL: *In '34 Chet bought that piece of land out in Woodstock. He said that somebody advised him, In the heart of the Depression, that at least he could grow his own food and he wouldn't starve to death. And there was a second reason: the theory that war was brewing in Europe and that Chicago would be a prime target, so he wanted to move his family out of the Chicago area. I did a wonderful interview with Edna Gould a few years back where she talked about how the city girl learned to live way out in the boonies and grow her own vegetables.*

FERD: I've still got the picture you sent me of that

SHEL: *The town of Woodstock is very proud of Chester Gould. I was there for Dick Tracy Days in 1991, and the whole town came out for it! All the stores in town had special Dick Tracy window displays, and they dedicated a Chester Gould Library and Museum. There are two Reuben Awards, all these plaques from throughout his career, stacks of originals, and one wall that's just personal drawings to Jean Gould from CHICAGO TRIBUNE artists.*

When she was a little girl, she saw her dad making these drawings for the fans and she told him she wanted one. She thought he forgot about it, but one day in the mail came this drawing of Dick Tracy and Junior. He also had the other CHICAGO TRIBUNE artists do drawings for her. The one by Caniff has Pat Ryan lecturing Terry, who's saying, "Now, when you take out Jean Gould, you'd better be on your best behavior or her daddy will get Dick Tracy to beat you up!"

FERD: Gould and I exchanged letters for years and years. If I'd see something in the paper out here about TRACY, I'd send it to him, and he'd send me anything he saw about MOON, which wasn't very often. But this is one of the things he wrote

SHEL: *Yes, I recognize the stationery. Can I read it for the tape?*

FERD: Sure!

SHEL: *"Dear Ferd: Thanks for the clip. God, you never know. I bought an abandoned lumberyard in Wayne, Illinois about 25 years ago . . . I retired from production of DICK TRACY in December, 1977. I don't like the present strip. The boys have turned it into a soap opera, not the law-and-order strip that Patterson had me do . . . Ferd, you and your son are doing a great job. I never miss MOON MULLINS. Keep well . . ."*

FERD: Maybe we shouldn't mention what he said about the new guys.

SHEL: *Well, Max Collins knew how he felt. When Gould retired, his name was still on the strip as consultant, but from what I was told, he didn't consult with them too much. He told Collins to do his own strip, his own characters, and not to copy him. When Collins got the strip, the syndicate man said, "This is an old strip. We don't see more than five years left in it." But he's had it for 15 years or so now. And none of us Gould purists are really that crazy about the new team. For the 50th anniversary, the syndicate did not want to do anything, so Collins hired a public relations firm out of his own pocket. This brought people to Chet's door, and in some interviews he made derogatory remarks just as he did in your letter, and Collins was furious. He said, "Here I am paying for this out of my own picket and Chet is knocking me and my work." He was so mad, he called the syndicate and said he wanted Gould's name taken off the strip, which is what happened.*

FERD: I guess he felt a real lack of support. Like I told you, when **Willard's** name went off of MOON and mine went on, we lost 25 papers. And I was told by a guy at the syndicate that he didn't think MOON was going to last very long. That was 25 years ago.

NEXT ISSUE: In Part Two of this three-part interview, Ferd passes on tales about a few more famous cartoonists he's known in his long career. He talks about his family, his personal history, and why he's remained a cartoonist all these years instead of going into real estate. Be here!

FRED B. MEINE

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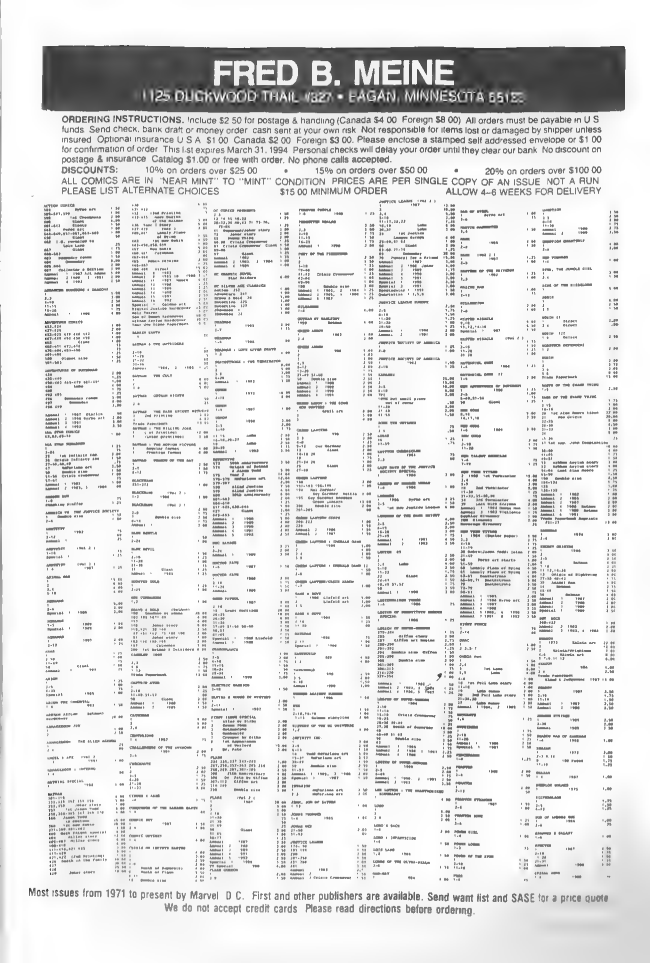

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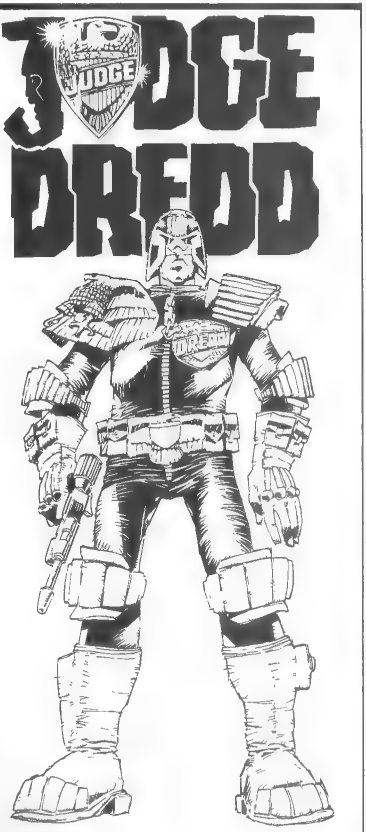
"The strength of 2000 AD: stories . . . superbly

The merging of Fleetway (formerly IPC) and London Editions (previously settled in Manchester) meant not only the forming of a new comic-publishing conglomerate with a big share of the British market (under the control of Denmark-based Gutenberghus) named Fleetway Editions, but also a sort of clash between the known Fleetway image (2000 AD, Judge Dredd, et al.) and London Editions' profile of the so-called "nursery comics" (funny animals and generally big-foot cartoons for the younger audience, MAD magazine, DC reprints etc.).

Since the death of the print mogul Robert Maxwell, which caused a big shake-up of the British market and the

JON DAVIDGE



Judge Dredd and all related characters TM & ©1992 Fleetway Editions

written. And the artists tell the story graphically."

world of the newsprint, his distinguished baby — Fleetway — had to pass through some changes to survive and carry on, merging with more European-oriented Gutenberghus-owned London Editions, which also needed a springboard. The benefit for Britain could be spreading into the demanding European market, while some materials and formats unknown in the United Kingdom came into use in Britain.

Mr. Jon Davidge — experienced editor from the print world with no previous background in comics — became a great fan of comics and an influential force in the field. Eager to explain the new directions of the firm he found himself in, he seemed the best choice for the conversation about it . . .

BOJAN M. DJUKIC: *I remember the days when IPC magazines, primarily 2000 AD, weren't luxurious color editions, but I fell in love with the beautiful black and white print and the presentation of the meticulous artwork and moody, yet humorous stories.*

JON DAVIDGE: Reprints like those with the classic materials in black and white still sell in the range of 50,000 copies a month.

BOJAN: *It's a very interesting thing to point out in Western Europe they're always using and re-using their creations. You can still have, in France or Belgium, LUCKY LUKE #1 which went out in the 1940s and they're constantly keeping it in print.*

JON: Some of the materials we published some 15 years ago are still amusing and entertaining, artwork hasn't dated. It's not just the historical value we are printing it for again. It's because of the people who didn't see it 15 years ago — and of course there are kids who are reading 2000 AD . . . some of the stories we printed long ago, they weren't alive when they were first published!

BOJAN: *Seems the material didn't go out of vogue.*

JON: In fact, it's becoming more in vogue. And 2000 AD is really at the . . . Only a year ago we put it in full color. That made a big difference. It's taken a little time for the title to settle down in color, because at first we had people doing some artwork who are more used to working in black and white and it wasn't as excellent as I wanted it to be. But now the title is — we regard 2000 AD as being in really good form at the moment.

BOJAN: *You can be proud of the quality. Some artists are more and more using fibre pens instead of dip-brushes with paints and dyes, colored inks.*

JON: There are all sorts of different techniques being used and different effects as well. We just have to be careful that the materials that the artists use are capable of being separated to make films from. We have to publish it; we don't commission the art to put it on the walls — although I'm proud of my Judge Dredd on the wall, an original by **Cliff Robinson.** We didn't produce it to be put in galleries, so we have to be careful with the materials they use. We have a very good new artist whose first work we're reproducing in 2000 AD at this very moment named **Robert Bliss.** I'll show you some of his work. He came in last week to do a few finishing touches on some of his original pages. And he was using iced tea! Apparently it's a technique which isn't in use very widely — I haven't come across it before.

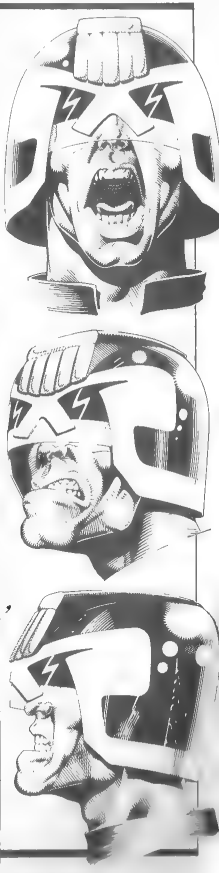
BOJAN: *As a matter of fact, I did! Just incidentally, though. One Serbian writer, Milorad Pavic, has relatively recently published a novel under the title A LANDSCAPE PAINTED WITH TEA.*

JON: Really?!

BOJAN: *He's really a marvelous writer, because he is composing his works in such a way that you can start to read his book, say, THE HAZARS' DICTIONARY even in the "Japanese" way, from the end toward the beginning, or from the middle in either direction, and be capable of understanding everything. Even if you start on page one and go to the last page, everything is there. He is really a master of the written word and of unique storytelling.*

By the way, I think the French guys have no problems with putting comics originals in galleries. That's happening even in England. The treatment goes in the same direction

JON: Some of the artwork these days is of great enough quality to be framed and exhibited. The importance from the publishing point of view is that we always bear in mind that our first priority is to publish comics. If the artists get the artwork back — which they *always* do from 2000 AD — and then sell it to a gallery, it's great! But we have to be careful editorially that first of all it's designed to be a good comics page. And that the story's told properly. The real strength of 2000 AD for many years was that the stories were superbly written. And the artists were able to tell the story graphically. One of the first things you find with inexperienced artists — even if they're brilliant in doing the figures, brilliant with drawing or painting — is



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"2000 AD still sells for 50 pence! Less than a dollar."

that telling the story is often the problem. We are extremely insistent on it, that the stories, the way they're told, are the equal of the art. And it comes second in my mind and certainly in the editorial mind as well, to frame just a beautifully drawn panel.

BOJAN: *When somebody makes that faithful decision, "I want to be a comics artist," he's hooked usually by the technique a:d drawing skills of his chozen idol — Most people aren't aware of that sequential thinking, but instead they're just putting illustrations together one by one. And that's not story-telling!*

JON: No. I've never believed that comics should be complicated. The great comics writers and artists could tell very complicated stories, but in a *comprehensible* way. **Brian Bolland** is the leader in being able to tell a story in a way that nobody's confused. The writers we use do not try to confuse the readers. It's very important that they entertain the readers and we select the writers who do that. I don't think that anybody tells the story visually as well as **Carlos Ezquerra** does. And it's no surprise that he is one of the co-creators of Judge Dredd.

BOJAN: *Is he still living in England or is he in Spain?*

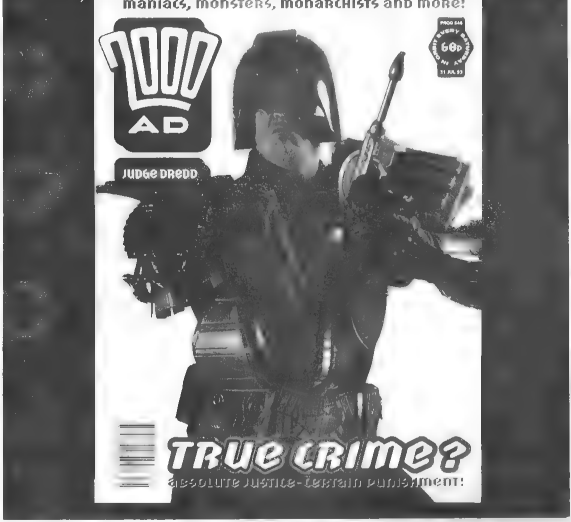
JON: Andorra. He lives in Andorra. It's an independent country, between France and Spain.

BOJAN: *Anyway — is there any change happening since merging with London Editions?*

JON: It is recent. Gutenberghus bought Fleetway completely from Maxwell. There are really no changes to the 2000 AD group which Fleetway calls its *adult group*, and which is commonly known in the U.S. better than our more juvenile titles. No changes are planned there. The Gutenberghus Group believes very firmly in high-quality publishing. They are particularly pleased looking at the products we're publishing now. In the last five years we have improved the quality of paper, in use of color. That's something they believe in internationally. We've already done that and indeed it is one of the reasons they were interested in Fleetway, that we showed ourselves to be increasing the quality of our publications.

BOJAN: *You mean, the "European quality?"*

JON: One of the things they point out about the U.K. market is how cheap comics are. 2000 AD still sells for 50 pence! That's — what? Less than a dollar. And it's all new, all in color. It's the highest quality writers and artists we can



Dragon—one of the last of his race, able to assume the human guise of Mark Dagon.
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#19 ART & COVER: MARK PROPHET $5
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"We have a population of 50 million, a quarter of the U.S."

get. Top leading talent we're putting there for 50 pence — less than a dollar — a week. Now in fact, 2000 AD is worth considerably more than that. In fact we can probably retail it for a pound but the history of the British comics is at the low price. To go from its current price to what it's actually worth really in comparative terms would be impossible from the marketing point of view. It's important that we don't do that because of the younger members of the audience. The main fans of 2000 AD probably think it's exceptionally good value for the money. And you have to be very careful about the price because if you price it at the wrong level it can actually sometimes detract from in terms of perception. If it is £0.50 it must be *worth* 50 pence.

Nevertheless, we have absolutely no plans to change the price. We are determined to keep the price at the low level. We can afford to do that because we sell 100,000 copies *a week* and have done so for 15 years.

BOJAN: *So, it is — what? 400,000* sold *copies per month?*

JON: Yeah.

BOJAN: *You are going after the quantity standards of the Americans. Their sales are going over 1 million.*

JON: Yes. We are not selling over a million but we put just one cover on each issue! — We have a total population of about 50 million, which is approximately a quarter of the population of the United States. But still it's a very solid market and 2000 AD is by far the leading product in the market. I don't like the word "product" really. The leading title in the market or publication.

And it has many strengths, not least of which is, of course, Judge Dredd — who is still in North America very much a synonym for British comics within its cult audience, but still hasn't reached a wide audience in North America. We are certain that the character could be bigger in the U.S. and Canada than he is now. There are, as I am sure everyone knows, a lot of rumors about the forthcoming feature film —

BOJAN: *One of the questions I've prepared —*

"Robert Maxwell's demise had nothing to do

JON: — and I'll answer when you ask me! *(Laughter.)* That will happen one day and it's impossible for me to say when because minds haven't been made up yet but we have all sorts of plans for Judge Dredd in America.

BOJAN: *How did it happen that you came to put together two totally different concepts from companies in different cities with different approaches to the medium, market, readers . . . ? And by the way, I've never heard of a company from Manchester calling itself "London Editions." Why aren't they called "Manchester Editions?"*

JON: *(Laughter.)* The actual technical history is that Gutenberghus bought an existing company — I'm not sure when; I'm not a great historian of that, but about ten years ago — they bought a firm called London Editions which in those days was a book packager, and then they turned it into a comics publisher. I really don't know why they chose to be in Manchester. But they were very pleased to locate the new company, which is Fleetway Editions, down here in London.

I'm happy to say that **Robert Maxwell's** demise had actually nothing to do with the acquisition of Fleetway by Gutenberghus. It was already in fact done before he died. Gutenberghus bought 50% of Fleetway before he died. They bought the second 50% shortly afterward, but I'm sure that was the long-term plan in any event.

Your question was about two different styles. Gutenberghus is . . . their great strength in Europe is Disney and Fleetway — as well as doing JUDGE DREDD and SLAINE and a lot of other terrifically popular titles — is also publishing Disney comics here in Britain. We also publish TEENAGE MUTANT HERO TURTLES.

BOJAN: *Aww, why don't you just say "Ninja Turtles" in England, as it's called in the original? C'mon, say it: Ninja! Ninja! Ninja!*

JON: *(Laughter.)* Well, the U.K. kids know them as Teenage Mutant *Hero* Turtles! It's a long story, deeply boring for everyone to listen to, but the official name in the U.K. is *Hero* Turtles. That is *slightly* different. I think the word "ninja" for some reason offended BBC, who broadcast the television programs, so they insisted on that being changed. It's no damage to the publishing — at one stage it sold 700,000 copies per issue! It's no longer at that level. So in addition to the 2000 AD titles we have other styles as well, "juveniles" for kids below the age of 10.

BOJAN: *"Nursery comics" market?*

JON: Yes, which is quite similar to some of the London Editions titles. London Editions always published licensed products. We — as Fleetway — a company which, if you trace it, goes back to

with the acquisition of Fleetway by Gutenberghus."

the 1890s — have almost exclusively done our own brand titles. We in common with the trend and market also do very successfully, I'm happy to say, particularly with the Turtles. We also publish licensed products.

BOJAN: *You mean, your own TURTLES, not reprints of Mirage Studios or Archie Comics materials?*

JON: We did both. Mirage and Archie did, I think, a monthly, whereas here in the U.K. it was every two weeks. So we had to create a lot of original materials by ourselves. We used the Archie material and our own material in sequence. So, there's a lot of original material for TURTLES created by Fleetway.

But London Editions fits quite neatly into the new Fleetway organization — at the younger level. We are very pleased by their expertise coming in to help us with Disney. They're the best Disney publishers in the world. In Germany they sell a million copies *a week!* That is extraordinary. And with that expertise coming to help us I think we can do a better job here in the United Kingdom.

BOJAN: *Maybe you can help the Americans do that job better . . .*

JON: I must say, I don't have any knowledge about Disney's operations in the United States or Canada. We are very much part of the European set-up.

But Gutenberghus is internationally the best publisher of Disney, the most successful. It sells the most copies. We need to sell more copies ourselves here. So there is a fit that makes sense. Gutenberghus wanted to be the market leader in the U.K., as well as all the markets in Northern Europe, in which they already are the market leader. And they were the market leaders with London Editions.

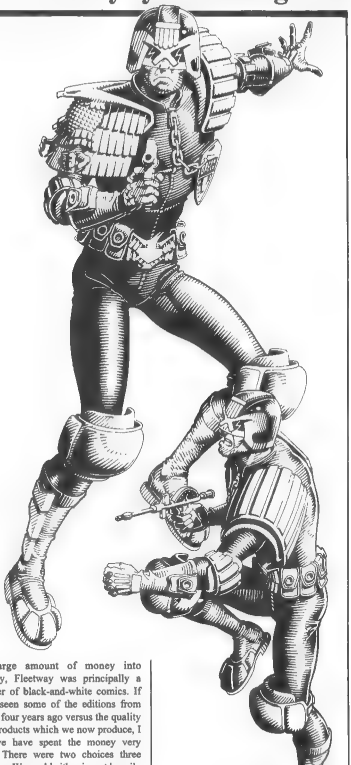
So the only way to remain the market leaders was to buy Fleetway. That was it! There was no other way.

BOJAN: *Do you have artists here workiˆg on Disney comics, or are you just reprinting?*

JON: We do create some original material here, although principally we use a pool of material which is created in various parts of Europe under the control of Gutenberghus in Copenhagen, Denmark.

BOJAN: *Could it be true that the announced campaign of some time ago with about £1,000,000 put into the development of Fleetway comics has failed? Are you now more reprint-oriented?*

JON: No, I surely don't believe it failed. At the time that we decided to invest a very large amount of money into Fleetway, Fleetway was principally a publisher of black-and-white comics. If you've seen some of the editions from three to four years ago versus the quality of the products which we now produce, I think we have spent the money very wisely. There were two choices three years ago: We could either invest heavily in the comics market in this country, or we could basically close Fleetway down. Maybe sell 2000 AD to somebody. Basically we had a very simple choice to make. As everyone knows, we made the



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"My background is in book publishing. I agree with royalties."

decision to spend a lot of money on the company, to spend a lot of money on the products and in the process sort out a viable and highly competitive royalty deal with our contributors. And it's paid off. No question about it — it's paid off.

BOJAN: *So you had a really thoughtful process in building that attitude toward the medium and toward the creators . . .*

JON: Absolutely right.

BOJAN: *Usually the creators complained that they're neglected.*

JON: I think they *were* neglected — to be honest — for a long time. My background is in book publishing and in every way I agree with the principle of paying royalties to the creators.

BOJAN: *Would you be so kind as to tell me how you came to this position? You mentioned that you came from book publishing.*

JON: Yes.

BOJAN: Can *you tell me more about your "origin" from entering the comics medium until now?*

JON: It's rather an unusual story, I think. I started my publishing career with a British company called Millson Boone, which is better known to most North American readers as Harlequin, publishers of the famous romances. I had a very successful and happy career with Harlequin operating as the manager of the export sales division. I enjoyed seven years of experience with that company. I learned publishing at Millson Boone. Before them, before I joined the publishing industry at all, I worked for Proctor & Gamble, one of the world's leading magazine companies. There's no connection between what Proctor & Gamble actually sell and what Harlequin or any other company I worked for actually sells. But I learned my business habits at Proctor & Gamble. My publishing background comes from books, I was looking after export sales for about seven years and then a number of unpleasant and unfortunate things happened to my major export markets. One of the major markets for Harlequin to export to was Iran. That became a problem. Another key market was Nigeria, which suffered terribly when the oil prices started to collapse during the middle of the '80s. Another key market was South Africa, which, as everyone knows, had its fair share of problems. In short, my key markets began to suffer. And there were no new ones at the moment.

BOJAN: *The incredible shrinking markets . . .*

JON: Yes! *(Laughter.)* It was very bad news. I had little choice — to leave Harlequin; I wasn't interested in the U.K. market for that company. So I then moved to a magazine publisher called Argos, here in London, and worked for two years as their marketing director. I must admit that their products didn't appeal to me. For example, it may be entertaining to people, I was the publishing director for a magazine called MOTHER AND BABY, which is about as far from JUDGE DREDD as it is humanly possible to get.

BOJAN: *But the little Mommy's monsters can sometimes be as nasty as the good Judge!*

JON: Yes! *(Laughter.)*

BOJAN: *Believe me, I have a little male 4-years-young elemental disaster at home!*

JON: Nevertheless, at that stage Fleetway was owned by the **Maxwell** organization. An old friend and ex-colleague of mine was running Maxwell's magazines. During a reorganization, a company, which **Maxwell** had bought some three years earlier, was suddenly dumped on his lap, and that company was Fleetway. Suddenly he had all this new organization which suddenly became part of his responsibility and which he knew nothing about. He didn't really have the time to take care of this extra company because he could see that it needed a lot of care, tender loving care, and some pretty big decisions were to be made.

BOJAN: *You're telling me about IPC?*

JON: No, this is after IPC, already under **Maxwell.** At the same time I happened to be moving from Argos and I had a couple of conversations. I was asked if I was interested in working in comics, and I said I had no idea. I hadn't read a comic for 20 years. But I liked the sound of what they were telling me.

So, to cut a long story short, I joined

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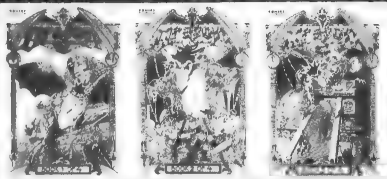

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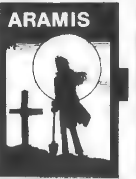

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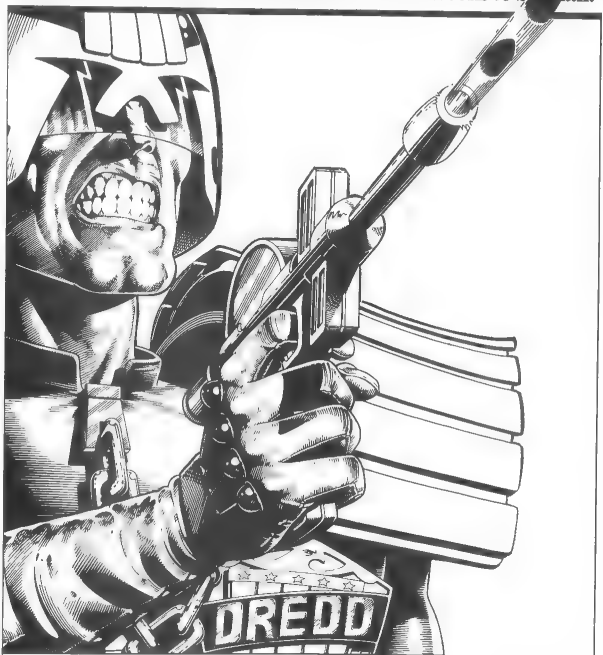
"I hadn't read 2000 AD until 1989. It took 2 weeks to b[illegible] fan."



Fleetway just over three years ago. Without the benefit of having read comics throughout my 37 years on Earth. But in some ways that's an advantage because I have to remain disapssionate. I hadn't read 2000 AD until — 1989. It took me about two weeks to become a fan.

I believe that if somebody who's been selling soap, selling romances, and selling MOTHER AND BABY for the last 15 years or so can turn onto comics as quickly as I did, then they must have some real merits. I became an ardent fan of comics very quickly but I don't have the long experience which a lot of other professionals in this industry do have. But I don't see this as a problem. I see it as an advantage because I bring a slightly different perspective to it.

BOJAN: *It's true. One of the questions I don't need to ask you now was, did you have in your youth an ambition like "I'd love to write and draw when I grow up." People say it's a disadvantage having too many "fan-boys" running the comics industry today. Now, there's you, as an example of a person lacking some possible fannish narrow-minded attitude toward the medium.*

JON: Well, it is true. I was not a "fan-boy." I suppose it's stretching the definition but I'm becoming the one, not exactly a *boy,* but if something terrible happens and I'm no longer to be involved in this business I can assure you that I'd make sure that the newsagent delivers 2000 AD every week to my house! So if you like I've become a bit of a fan.

I think Fleetway of three years ago

"Most of our 2000 AD readers are 14 and older."

didn't need a fan-boy. We've got a lot of very good professionals in this company who've been in comics publishing for over 30 years. I rely heavily on their experience editorially. I don't make editorial decisions.

BOJAN: *What is the exact title of your position?*

JON: Managing director. So I rely totally on the people who have unbelievable amounts of experience. There is one person who joined Fleetway when I was two years old, so we don't suffer at Fleetway for lack of experience.

BOJAN: *What did you gain and what did you lose in this new situation?*

JON: I don't think that we've lost anything. I think we've gained the real benefit of being part of a company which specializes in juvenile publishing. And it's effectively what they do. When we were part of **Maxwell**, part of IPC, we were the only division which did juvenile publishing. We are now a large and very successful corporation which specializes in this. The management knows and loves comics which are their business. That is the major advantage to Fleetway, the major advantage to the U.K. market. Fleetway is now completely owned by the company which knows and minds and loves comics and juvenile publishing — that's the major thing they have brought to us.

BOJAN: *And your readers? Who are they? Which sex, age, level of education?*

JON: On the 2000 AD group, most of our readers are 14 years and older. 2000 AD has readers who started reading it 15 years ago, who are now in their 30s and early 40s and they still read it every week; that's one of the reasons it's such an extraordinary success. People grow up with it. It doesn't seem to date for them. 2000 AD has grown up in many ways along with them.

BOJAN: *The household company?*

JON: Exactly. Generation after generation, father passing on the tradition and habit to the son. We at the moment have, I believe, a gap which we are developing a title to fill, which is for the 10-14-year-olds, because this is really the area in which Fleetway dominated British comic publishing almost for the last 100 years. At the moment there isn't anything that appeals to them really. 2000 AD appeals to some of the real adolescent fans in that area. I always believed Fleetway and comics in general should succeed on a mass-market basis. We need a new product in that area; we are developing one fast at the moment. We are half-way through a very heavy research program on a dummy to fit that which will, if you like, be a *younger brother* to 2000 AD. And the research we've done so far indicates that it will be a successful concept. Now that London Editions joins this, we now publish comics for children from 3 up to adults who, as I said, are up to the age of 40. So we have a complete spread now. But the one area in which I think we have to develop new products and new titles fast is that of the early teens.

BOJAN: *You mean, the age when you need to form some taste, to invest in the future readership.*

JON: Absolutely, you're right.

BOJAN: *Is this the same outfit which was considered revolutionary at the end of the '70s and the beginning of the '80s?*

JON: You mean, Fleetway?

BOJAN: *Yeah! Do we have the aging and maturing process of the family?*

JON: Do you mean the company or the readers?

BOJAN: *The company.*

JON: I don't think there was a major change. I think in the early '80s and maybe the late '70s when Fleetway was the juvenile, in fact, the *youth* group of IPC, IPC strategically did not want to have a big involvement in youth products, certainly not in comic format, which is why they sold the youth group to **Robert Maxwell**. As a result, no one really continued investment in Fleetway through the '80s. 2000 AD was the last really successful launch, and that was in 1977. So there haven't been new weekly titles, which is the standard British accepted and tried format published through the '80s. That's something that in the '90s Fleetway proposes to change very substantially. So I think that there is a difference. Comics publishing, as anyone working in the business knows, is a very expensive business. The editorial cost of one of our weekly publications, 32 pages plus a cover, is substantially more expensive than extremely glossy magazines that I was working on before because we pay a substantially fair amount of money for the new artwork and for writers and . . . In addition to that the separation costs are very high. It is an expensive business.

BOJAN: *Do you rely on the American/British tradition, or the European —*

"Dredd has a strange uniform. Not the superhero costume."

even with the manga influences from Japan? They're famous for the weekly output of the enormous phonebook-sized quantity and narrative/visual quality. And they've got a large female fan following.

JON: Absolutely. We have spent a lot of time watching and learning fast what the European experiences are. We've done some graphic novels in the European tradition. We've also looked at the possibility of doing a monthly comic format based on the European material. At the moment I have to say that the experiments have been very interesting and we've learned a great deal from them. We didn't have very much success.

As for manga, we've had a lot of interest in some stories that we have seen from Japan. There is a format difficulty which is — they tell their stories in a very long-winded way. Not a lot happens very fast. It takes a lot of time to tell their stories; their comics tend to be two or three hundred pages long, whereas ours are normally about 30 pages long.

So there is a problem of adapting the material from them. I mean, the Japanese market is phenomenal! They do rely I think in some cases quite heavily on violence and —

BOJAN: — *explicit pornography* —

JON: — it's *quite* explicit and there's a lot of explicit sex in European comic magazines, too, which we can't introduce to this market. Not because the law says we can't — because we *can* — but because the taste in comics is different. So there are lots of problems in adapting incoming ideas from overseas. I still have a lot of time for some of the Japanese materials. We haven't yet figured out the way of adapting it for our own British style. And the British style is in some respect different from the American style, too. This is not a market which has traditionally published a superhero style of comics successfully as Marvel found out in their various attempts to do so. I wouldn't say that 2000 AD and the successful formats we've got actually relies on superheroes. It relies on *heroes* but very rarely with magical powers —

BOJAN: — *and costumes.*

JON: Very rarely with extraordinary costumes. Our Judge Dredd has a very strange uniform, but that's not exactly the Superhero costume!

BOJAN: *Excuse me for this, but are you still the trend-setters?*

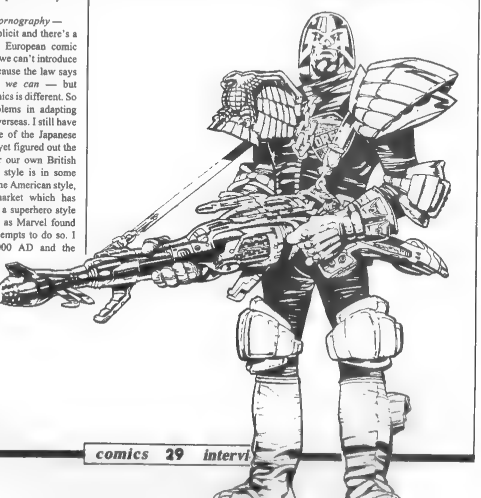
JON: Yes, we are and we are very proud of that. 2000 AD — once again I tend to concentrate on that — is really a by-word for a . . . if you like, for adult publishing which . . . when I say *adult* I really mean 14 years of age plus. Some people might not define 14-year-olds as adults but for the purpose of our own internal use we regard them as the *adult group*

BOJAN: *So we can count on 14-year-olds as adolescents?*

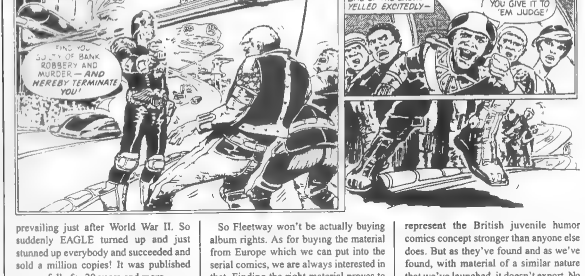
JON: Perhaps as adolescents. I don't know if it's the case in America but in the U.K. the word *adolescent* tends to be slightly pejorative which is why we tend to avoid it. Adolescents tend to be the kind of folks who tend to spray paint all over the subway trains and that's what people think that adolescents do. But trend-setters . . . Absolutely! We have new styles, new writers, new artists, concepts and characters all the time in our publications. And if you look at how the title has evolved on an annual basis it's different. So we have some people that complain because they like it the way that it was. No one has yet succeeded in copying our formula because our formats tend to change a lot. But we've evolved the formula rather than radically revolutionized it. I think that we're *the* trend-setters actually.

BOJAN: *There was some kind of "revolution" at the end of the '70s, I think, the same "revolution" that happened at the beginning of World War II when BEANO and DANDY exploded on the market. Today VIZ has sparkled a lot of imitators like MAD did in the '50s. Is "sparkled" the right expression?*

JON: "Sparked." I think the most influential comic published after World War II was EAGLE, which is an old Fleetway title. That completely changed the nature and format of comics publishing. It was the first new title after the war which used color because of the poor economic conditions and restrictions



'JUDGE DREDD: THE MOVIE will have a dramatic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YEAH! YOU GIVE IT TO 'EM JUDGE!

prevailing just after World War II. So suddenly EAGLE turned up and just stunned up everybody and succeeded and sold a million copies! It was published successfully for 20 years and more.

The next most influential comic turned out to be 2000 AD. It wasn't launched with that in mind, it was another boy's weekly comic launched by Fleetway when it was IPC. It just happened to have a certain magic that went into space. But I think I drifted away from your question! *(Laughter.)*

BOJAN: *Is there a place for the European materials? For example, Loisel's PETER PAN album — did you see it?*

JON: M-hm. Yes, I have.

BOJAN: *I think it's gorgeous. I somehow sense that Fleetway is the right place for the presentation of that graphic novel here in the U.K.*

JON: The market for albums in the United Kingdom is a very difficult one. Our direct sales outlet in the U.K. is not substantial enough to be able to survive on alone. Only about 10% of 2000 AD sells through comic shops; 90% of it sells through the newsstands. Now the newsstands and the book shops have yet to get familiar enough with albums (or graphic novels) to display them in the right way to sell them. In short — how to make them succeed. In addition to that Fleetway doesn't have the book-sales force which sells to the bookshops. We have to use third parties' book sales force, which is fairly expensive. As a result we are currently working on a series of proposals from book publishers. We want to publish Fleetway's materials as graphic novels under license. And that's what we are going to do. We are looking at the moment at some very interesting proposals for the U.S. market.

So Fleetway won't be actually buying album rights. As for buying the material from Europe which we can put into the serial comics, we are always interested in that. Finding the right material proves to be very difficult. There is absolutely some astonishing quality. My favorite comic book is published by Casterman, in French. It's absolutely fabulous. I'd love to do it, but I can't find the right format for it. There's some extraordinary work available which has never been published in Britain. I still think that's an opportunity. But the time is not right. Apart from anything else, Britain is in its worst recession since the second World War. There's not a lot of consumer confidence at the moment.

BOJAN: *Where is Fleetway's place today in the European and the world comic markets, compared to the competition?*

JON: Well, I think that Fleetway represents the British market and British talent exclusively. There is not anyone else who represents Great Britain in the comics world.

BOJAN: *Leo Baxendale?*

JON: He did a lot of work for us in the old days. Juvenile comics artist.

BOJAN: *ANDY CAPP by Reg Smythe?*

JON: Yeah . . .

BOJAN: *ANDY is a typical British comic about a British couple and the British mentality that did well worldwide*

JON: It is, yes. It's very old, though. And BUSTER, which is one of our titles is, in fact, Andy Capp's nephew. So there's a connection there. But really in 1992 nobody really represents the British — the exportable British comic material the way that we do.

D.C. Thompson is a terrifically successful comics publisher here. They represent the British juvenile humor comics concept stronger than anyone else does. But as they've found and as we've found, with material of a similar nature that we've launched, it doesn't export. No one is interested in that overseas. So if you talk about the British tradition I think it is held by us. Marvel U.K. I think absolutely rightly is trying to be more American, trying to introduce the American tradition into Britain. I don't know if they are succeeding or not; it's a very, very challenging task. They've got titles which I think loosely stated American tradition, but originated here. And published in the U.S. and Canada as well. But in terms of British tradition I think that it's Fleetway. If I had time, I'd go to our archive which is about 20 miles away, which is absolutely enormous. It contains comics going back to 1891! So in terms of tradition no one has anything like the tradition of Fleetway. I feel the pressure of a very, very illustrious past because I am with the company that has done so many extraordinary things in comics publishing in the last hundred years. I want to continue that tradition and it could not be a more challenging task.

BOJAN: *Does Fleetway have its own "universe" in the DC or Marvel sense, and is the world of Judge Dredd sufficient?*

JON: I would say that there is a Judge Dredd universe but there is no Fleetway universe. Judge Dredd's universe is extremely substantial — but we don't operate quite the same way as DC or Marvel have their own universes.

BOJAN: *Can you tell me, are you as a company, still seeking new contributors or are you satisfied with the already established "tribe"?*

JON: Absolutely not! We are always looking for new talent. In about an hour's

effect. He will be a mass market character worldwide."

time I'm going to fly to Glasgow for the Glasgow Comics Convention to look for new talent. For some reason — I don't know why — but Scotland has always been a source of terrific comics talent. There's an extraordinary number of brilliant Scots, Scottish writers and artists. So we are going up there; there's about six of us going there any minute now.

We are always looking for new talent. We must continue to do so. On the other hand, we have a terrific amount of material in stock at the moment and if any writer or artist succeeds in getting our editorial people to commission them they'll probably see publication in about one year because we have so much material developed and ready to go. I hope we'll always be looking for new talent because that's the way you set the trends.

BOJAN: *Is the comics market really shrinking or growing, considering the sales and prices of some titles in the world and in Britain?*

JON: It's a slowly shrinking market. The exception to that statement is the 2000 AD group, which is still growing. I think that is because it is a relatively unique product.

BOJAN: *"Incredible shrinking market" which is actually growing!!!*

JON: Well . . . Bits of it are shrinking, bits of it are growing. I think we could make it grow fast if we succeed in launching the right title for 10-14-year-olds. That is the key as far as I'm concerned. There is really nothing as powerful as good promotion. We can do it with this. Editorially speaking we can always improve. But in terms of its value for money the talent involved . . . There isn't a great deal more that we at 2000 AD can do. Anything we can do to feed lots and lots of fresh and young readers and the way to do that is to have a new title which they'll be reading and then move up to 2000 AD and that's it. Then it won't be a shrinking market.

BOJAN: *What impact would JUDGE DREDD: THE MOVIE have on your company and comics materials?*

JON: I think it will have a dramatic effect on Dredd as a character, particularly in North America, where currently he is, as I've said, a cult character. He will be a mass market character in the U.S. and Canada. I think that he has all the potential to be a mass-market character. So I think that we will almost certainly have a new angle to our business with Judge Dredd as a worldwide phenomenon rather than as a British phenomenon.

BOJAN: *You know why I'm asking this? Joe Orlando of DC Comics once told me*

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"We spent a lot developing Dredd for movies."

they can just live on royalties from the SUPERMAN movies for a year or more.

JON: I'm sure he wasn't serious about that! *(Laughter.)* It would be very nice for us to get a payoff of that nature. We spent a very large amount of money developing the character for movie potential. Not only in terms of the creative but also the legal side. It would be nice to get some payoffs on the character considering our investments, which are in six-figure amounts. It would also be very good for the creators, who stand to earn substantial royalties on the film, on merchandise as well as publishing. It would be good for them to feel that their work of 15 years is rewarded in such a way. But we'll be staying as a comics publisher. It would be nice to make a walk from the bank with the big royalty check, of course. I mean, I'm primarily a businessman and we welcome the additional revenues, but I am more interested in the publishing opportunities overseas than in what the film would bring.

BOJAN: *Can we say that the difference between British and American comics becomes more and more insignificant?*

JON: Difficult for me to say! I cannot for one minute claim to be an expert on American comics. I can claim to be some sort of an expert for the British taste now, even though as I've already said my experience goes back only about three years. But certainly the British taste hasn't yet and probably never will accept the concept of superheroes as the primary reason for reading comics. It's a very complicated . . . I certainly don't have the answer why that is the case but I'm sure there's a complicated series of cultural influences which make that the case. I can speculate for hours but I don't really know the answer. I suspect certainly from the amount of British talent which is doing work for American publishers, there's possibly a degree of influence coming from Britain at the moment. Although I wouldn't speculate how big that influence is because I'm no expert in it. But I know that an awful lot of Batman material is being written by **Alan Grant** who is, of course, one of our own famous Scotsmen. **Bisley** is quite a huge phenomenon over there. **Cam Kennedy** is also a Scotsman. There's all sorts of Scotsmen doing work for American comics as well as in their home market. We've got some American writers in 2000 AD. I'm not quite qualified to give you a definite answer to that but I suspect if anything, there's a slight influence going west rather than coming across the Atlantic to us.

We've had a number of successes in other areas than graphic novels, although to be honest we had to manage without expertise in the book market. We had a phenomenon with Batman vs. Judge Dredd in JUDGMENT ON GOTHAM. It sold out in two weeks. And it's a good piece of work; I know it did well in the United States. DC sold over 200,000 copies and of ocourse there's a follow-up in the works. But it's not a graphic novel format as it is here in Britain, and it sold out completely very, very quickly. We had a record attendance to the signing. We had more people at the JUDGMENT ON GOTHAM signing than attended the signing **David Bowie gave** for one of his albums and **Stiug** gave for one of his albums because it was done in a comics shop straight in the center of London.

BOJAN: *"Virgin" comics shop?*

JON: Right, that's the one. And we did extremely well with the SLAINE trilogy. We've been successful with some other titles. I don't know whether the future lies ahead for that.

BOJAN: *"British School of Comics" — does it exist here?*

JON: What do you mean?

BOJAN: *In the way that we can speak about the Franco-Belgian or Spanish or Filipino school of visual storytelling.*

JON: I think it does to some extent although at the moment the biggest influence on art is **Simon Bisley.**

BOJAN: *Like Brian Bolland used to be in the '80s?*

JON: Exactly. If you look at the portfolios of people coming to conventions you'd be amazed how many brand-new people try to copy **Simon Bisley.** And there is only one **Simon Bisley.** So it is not an easy style to emulate. Even his original black-and-white work that he did for THE ABC WARRIORS is virtually impossible to emulate. But there is nevertheless an influence of that fully painted artwork style, which is more prevalent in British comics than it is in the U.S. I think you can possibly describe it as The British School. But maybe you should ask that question to somebody like **Richard Burton** or **Steve MacManus,** who are senior editorial people.

BOJAN: *Do you see the reason for existence of institutions such as London Cartoon Centre or Joe Kubert's School of Cartoon and Graphic Arts? Or do you think being self-taught is sufficient for this profession?*

JON: I think there are certain skills and techniques which no matter what your raw talent, you need to learn. We talked earlier about storytelling in art. That is one of the problems we find with new

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"Britain doesn't accept superheroes as the reason for comics."

artists. They're brilliant artists but they cannot tell the story! We find the same with writers. Excellent writers with great imagination but they can't write a comic book. They need to be taught. It's quite time-consuming for our editorial people to continue sending manuscripts and artwork pages back with "change this," "change that." In a way I'd welcome the idea of there being some sort of formal education in the area.

BOJAN: *Why doesn't Fleetway have an established bullpen with a permanent pool of talent creating the materials for printing?*

JON: We are not quite as regimented as that. There isn't a specific way or style; we tend to reflect all that's best in British art and British writing rather than saying "This is The Fleetway Style and The Way To Do That." To some extent you could say that we have an influence over how things are to be done because our editorial people are fairly insistent that the

"It costs to stay in the lead but that's where we have to

material should be done in the 2000 AD system. But there are a lot of different styles in 2000 AD. We tend to be if you'd like, more eclectic. I think it works better for us. I mean, when you . . . We do considerable research on 2000 AD. We talk to our readers all the time and you often find in an issue that contains five stories, five different people would prefer five different stories! We don't really have a recognizable style at the moment. If you look back a bit, the **Bolland** and **McMahon** styles were very prevalent. But at the same time we had **Carlos Ezquerra** working in the same issue with a different style, in a way a more flamboyant style. I think Fleetway and 2000 AD tend to work better when you have variety within certain bounds. But the titles we have published unsuccessfully have usually failed because there isn't a focus to them. There isn't an identity to them. It's just too much different stuff in it. It's a much looser identity, not a straitjacketed one.

BOJAN: *Could we say that this business, and the art form, is not out of fashion with so many visual innovations around us in other media and areas?*

JON: It's different now, isn't it? We now have to compete visually with all the other media which . . . *(Pause.)* Our market, our readers are subjective. Visually and design-wise it's a completely different world from just ten years ago. Everyone has color TV now, magazines and newspapers and all other media are highly designed. Advertising is very slick and well designed. Computer games exist in a way in which they never did and soon we'll have relatively easier affordable *virtual reality* possibilities. We just have to maintain an extremely high level visually, an extremely high level in terms of the design as well as an extremely high level of storytelling. We'll continue to work harder. It isn't as easy as it used to be for sure, but we won't go out of fashion as long as we keep up with the design and visual advances being made elsewhere. We are capable of this, no question about it. But it certainly isn't inexpensive! It costs a lot of money to stay in the lead but that's where we have to be. It's very easy to go out of fashion and it's hard to stay up there competing for the taste of young people.

be. It's hard to compete for the taste of young people."

Everything will be available televisually or in the computer format soon but all the work we do in conversations with the readers and potential readers indicates that the relationship between themselves and the comic book is a very personal and private one. Not one which they can necessarily share with the hard-edged version on a computer, a TV set or on a cinema screen. They can actually take their comic, go anywhere they want and in the privacy of their own home or wherever they can actually — this sounds pompous but they can relate and interact with the comic book. And that's the one thing which will keep us going a good many years and who can predict what is going to happen in the next 15-20 years.

But the relation between the reader and the comic is different, very substantially different to the relationship between somebody and the computer screen. Of course there will be formats which we can't even begin to imagine in the future. But provided we maintain that personal relationship I think it will pay but it won't be easy and nobody can guarantee a success either.

BOJAN: *Not so long ago there was an opinion originated in America, heavily rooted in their attitude toward sequential art — namely, they calmly predicted and expected that comic books and comic media in general would go down the drain. Many distinguished professionals were vocal considering this topic. They'd consider for sure as a lunatic somebody who'd tell them that soon comics would again sell in millions, with a large fan following.*

JON: With the editor of 2000 AD who's a major computer expert . . . *(starts to cough heavily)*

BOJAN: *Please, stop talking about computers or you will choke!*

JON: I always choke when I think of them; the very thought is destroying me! *(Laughter.)* I am confident they'll be a medium for future publishing in 10-15 years, maybe more. But beyond that I or anyone predicting what is going to happen is taking an enormous risk to credibility. I mean, who can really tell?

Certainly the future — as far as I am concerned — the long term for me is 5-15 years in terms of planning. We are pretty safe in that period.

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MARK FREEDMAN

"Sylvester Stallone is the right superstar

Photo: Courtesy Rogers & Cowan

to portray the superhero Judge Dredd."

MARK FREEDMAN

Mark Freedman is the merchandising mastermind behind the TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES phenomenon. Now, as president of Surge Comic Properties, Inc., Freedman is about to launch another major property, JUDGE DREDD, in anticipation of the summer 1995 Hollywood Pictures movie release starring Sylvester Stallone. Freedman has been working on his JUDGE DREDD project for several years and scored a major coup, convincing Hollywood entertainment moguls that Dredd would be a marketing and box-office hit. As the exclusive North American licensing agency, Surge is already busy crafting a synergistic environment involving a diversity of licensed products for Judge Dredd. "Licensing surrounding the Judge Dredd character and movie is gaining tremendous momentum," Freedman said. First up: DC Comics, under license from Surge, will soon launch a pair of original comic-book series starring Judge Dredd. In an exclusive interview, Freedman shared a brief look at what is gearing up to be the Judge Dredd phenomenon . . .

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"I think JUDGE DREDD goes beyond BATMAN."

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Mark Freedman
Age: Over 21 (actually, 39)
Born: New York, NY
Currently Reside: New York
Education: Graduated Clark University in Western Massachusetts
Occupation: I'd like to consider myself an architect of entertainment properties because I put all the pieces together.

Sylvester Stallone and Wesley Snipes star in "Demolition Man."

MARK LUCAS: *The long-rumored JUDGE DREDD film is finally in the early stages of production?*

MARK FREEDMAN: Yes. There will definitely be a major film. It has been announced by the producer, **Ed Pressman.**

LUCAS : *How did you become involved in working with JUDGE DREDD?*

MARK : I actually discovered the comic several years ago. I became involved with JUDGE DREDD when I discovered that the entertainment had been licensed by the Pressman Film Corp. They've made WALL STREET, HOFFA, and a lot of other top hits. **Ed Pressman** and I sat down. I told him what I wanted to do; he told me what he wanted to do. And, we worked together on it. I agreed to handle the merchandising and marketing and he would handle the film rights. I went out and got a major toy company to take on the master toy rights. And, he's gone out and is making the film. He contracted with a company called Cinergi, headed by **Andy Vajna** who was **Mario Kassar's** partner. They did the RAMBO films. They have a deal with Hollywood Pictures, which is financing the Pressman/Cinergi production with a reported budget of $65 million. I'm sure a good deal of that will go into the special effects. I'm very excited about it.

LUCAS : *What can you tell us about the plot of the film? Will it follow the comic book closely?*

MARK : I can tell you that the script was written by **William Wisher** who wrote TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY. I understand that they're currently still working on it, in the polishing stage. I've seen some early designs of Mega-City

YOU FORGET, SPIKES... WHEN SOMEONE CALLS ON THE LAW FOR HELP... BE HE MUTIE...ALIEN... CYBORG...OR HUMAN...
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"This could be a $200 million motion picture;

Photo: Andrew Cooper, compliments Warner Bros.

one and the environment and the sets. It's awesome. It's powerful. Some of the costuming and some of the robotics that are being used are amazing. The film has a target release Memorial Day 1995.

LUCAS : *How do you think this "super cop" will play in the United States in the 1990s?*

MARK : I think that the theme is classic and has proven box-office appeal. What I saw in JUDGE DREDD was that it had an "epicness," if you will. When you put those elements together, I think it will be more powerful than, say, BATMAN meets STAR WARS, with the history and genealogy. It has the great story that STAR WARS had, yet it also has the dark superhero-ness like BATMAN. There's so much depth to JUDGE DREDD. As **Steven Spielberg says**, we're story-tellers, and I think JUDGE DREDD is a great story. I think all great entertainment and licensed product success comes from great stories. That's why I went for it.

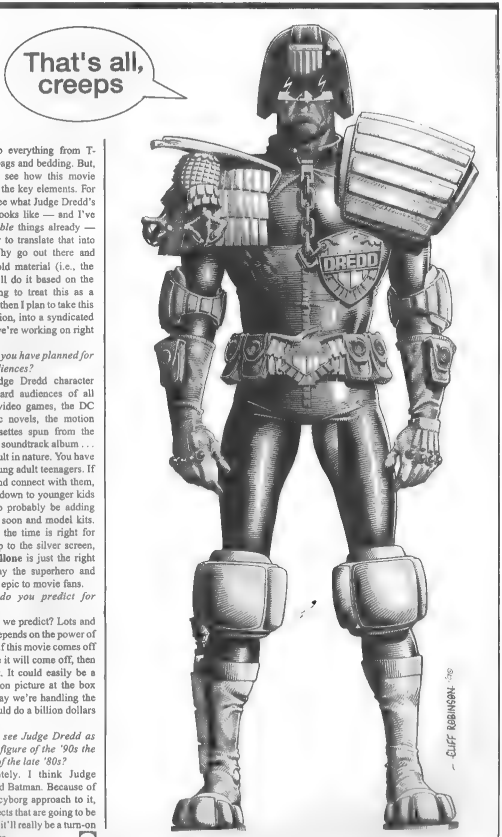
LUCAS : *You were the force behind the licensing of the TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES. What can we expect in relation to DREDD?*

MARK : I don't operate the way many people in this industry do. We develop properties through licensing, and we build them slowly and carefully. With most people, it's a hit-and-run, short-term effort. They go out there and get as many licenses as possible, flooding the market with product. Instead, I manage for long-term success. The thing about JUDGE DREDD is that we've already put together what I think are the cornerstone products and licenses. We have the master toy rights completely done. We've licensed Williams/Bally Midway manufacturing, the people who are doing MORTAL KOMBAT, for coin-operated pinball and arcade games. We've got the Sega and Nintendo platforms for video games. We've started a fan club through Responsive Marketing that will go out when the comic books are released (we have a new comic-book series licensed with DC). You can choose between entertainment, toys, video games (both arcade and home use), as well as the DC comics. We have the foundation laid

LUCAS : *Your strategy appears to be one of a syngergistic environment, combining comics, the film, action figures, video games . . .*

MARK : These are forms of kids' entertainment and they're probably the most prevalent merchandising in culture today. When I say "kids," I don't mean little kids but teenagers and adults. We try to tap into that. To be perfectly honest with you, I could go out there and sell 60

the merchandise could do a billion dollars."



licenses. I can do everything from T-shirts to slumber bags and bedding. But, slowly. I want to see how this movie develops and take the key elements. For example, when I see what Judge Dredd's final motorcycle looks like — and I've seen some *incredible* things already — we're going to try to translate that into merchandising. Why go out there and rush it based on old material (i.e., the original comic)? I'll do it based on the movie. We're going to treat this as a movie license first, then I plan to take this further into animation, into a syndicated TV series (which we're working on right now).

LUCAS : *What do you have planned for the more adult audiences?*

MARK : The Judge Dredd character seems geared toward audiences of all ages. I think the video games, the DC comic, the graphic novels, the motion picture, video cassettes spun from the motion picture, the soundtrack album . . . all will be more adult in nature. You have to appeal to the young adult teenagers. If we're successful and connect with them, then it will trickle down to younger kids as well. We'll also probably be adding trading cards very soon and model kits. As for the movie, the time is right for Judge Dredd's leap to the silver screen, and **Sylvester Stallone** is just the right superstar to portray the superhero and bring the futuristic epic to movie fans.

LUCAS : *What do you predict for JUDGE DREDD?*

MARK : What do we predict? Lots and lots of success. It depends on the power of the entertainment. If this movie comes off the way we believe it will come off, then the sky's the limit. It could easily be a $200 million motion picture at the box office. And, the way we're handling the merchandise, it could do a billion dollars at wholesale.

LUCAS : *Do you see Judge Dredd as the entertainment figure of the '90s the way Batman was of the late '80s?*

MARK : Absolutely. I think Judge Dredd goes beyond Batman. Because of the futuristic and cyborg approach to it, and the special effects that are going to be in this film, I think it'll really be a turn-on for fans everywhere.

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LAST WORD

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COMIC-STRIP INFO SOUGHT! AN OPEN LETTER

Dear Mesdames, dear Gentlemen,

I'm a young animation artist (25) coming from Germany and working in Luxemburg at the "Lyceé des Arts et Métiers." In January I will give a lecture about the history and the present of comic strips, newspaper comic strips, comic books and magazines. The audience will be animation artists, comic artists and teachers coming from France, Belgium, Luxemburg and Germany.

To prepare my lecture I bought a lot of books, magazines and so on, and I asked the "Bulls Pressedienst" in Frankfurt, which is the largest comic distributor in Germany, for information. But I'd also like to find out something about the foreign market, namely Great Britain and the United States. Many series come over from these countries. They are quite popular here and it would be interesting and funny if I could tell something about them.

But I don't want to bore my audience with too many stories about the authors or the different drawing styles; I'm sure they know more about than me and they are all fine artists, so that it would be difficult for me to tell them something new about drawing. Thus I think it is a good idea too tell something about the business: how does an author find an editor, how much do they earn, how many times does a newspaper strip get used in newspapers and magazines, to how many countries are they sold, and so on.

All information could be helpful for me: catalogues, folders, statistics, whatever you have and whatever has something to do with the producing and selling of comic strips.

This lecture is part of my last exam that I will pass in summer 1994 so you could help me to get a good mark. Be sure that I can read the English language better than I can write it.

I would be glad to hear from you.

Mike Nilles
Waldwiesenstrae-17
66773 Schwalbach
Germany

The best way I know to expose you to the maximum possible amount of people inside the industry and out, Mike, is to throw your request for info open to one and all right here in our letters page. Please, anyone interested in helping expand the cause of comics international, write Mike directly with syndicated strip info of all kinds — and use airmail; he needs help fast, by January. — *DAK*

INTERVIEW welcomes your thoughts and comments in the Last Word. Send your correspondence to: DAK, COMICS INTERVIEW, 234 Fifth Ave., Suite 301, New York, NY 10001, or fax your letter to (706) 782-6625. Please include your name and address.

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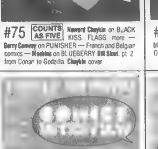

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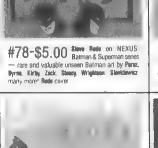

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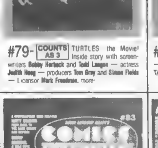

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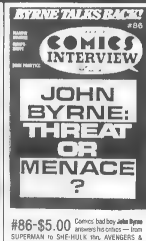

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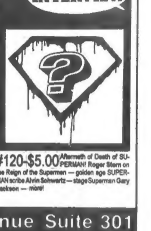

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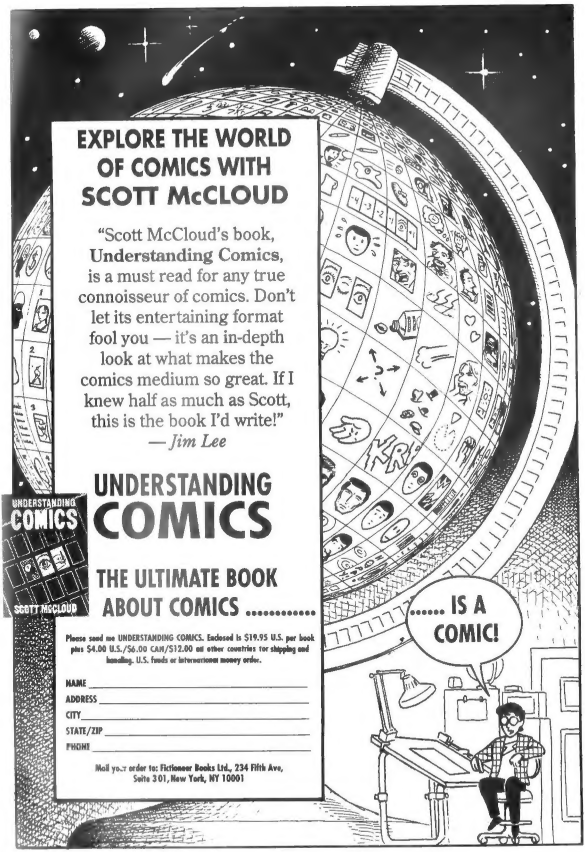
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